

THE DREISER NEWSLETTER

Volume Eight, Number One

Spring 1977

DREISER AT THE AQUARIUM

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In the January number of *Tom Watson's Magazine* for 1906, Theodore Dreiser published a short article entitled "A Lesson from the Aquarium." The article discusses the observed behavior of stork minnows, hermit crabs, and shark suckers. Dreiser extends his description, however, to make some criticisms of human behavior as well. The article is interesting because it provides a probable germ for the lobster and squid episode in *The Financier* and says some things about Dreiser's own thinking after his breakdown and before his success in magazine editing and publishing.

Tom Watson's Magazine, or *The Watson Magazine* as it was called at first, was founded in 1904 by a group of financial backers and populist Tom Watson to "preach Democracy in plain-English."¹ The magazine folded less than two years later after Watson himself was dismissed as editor over a salary dispute. In a final effort to broaden the magazine's appeal the management moved sharply away from the populist's philosophy, even while retaining his name. In the 1906 N. W. Ayer and Son's *Newspaper Annual*, for example, an advertisement ironically boasted, "seventy-eight per cent. of the circulation of *Tom Watson's Magazine* is distributed in the Southern States, a territory rich in possibilities for the manufacturer who desires to extend his business."² The same blurb goes on to describe the magazine's subscribers as "men who enjoy good incomes, generally professional and business men of the best class."

Dreiser's association with *Tom Watson's Magazine* began in 1905 through his friend Richard Duffy, who was an editor there. The two had met in 1898 when Duffy was an editor at *Ainslee's*. From the beginning of their friendship Duffy did much to promote Dreiser's work and to care for the author personally. Beyond getting him a part-time job with *Ainslee's*, Duffy coun-

seled Dreiser during his emotional and spiritual crisis of 1901 and 1902 to "exercise in the open" and to recite stanzas of the inspirational poem "Under Difficulties" to his wife. Dreiser even received a visit from Duffy in Philadelphia, where the latter suggested that the despondent Dreiser read Mill's *Autobiography*, recommending especially the chapter "A Crisis in My Life."

Throughout 1905 Dreiser had published several articles in *Tom Watson's Magazine* with such downbeat titles as "The Cradle of Tears," "The Silent Worker," and "The Loneliness of the City." For "A Lesson from the Aquarium" Dreiser gathered his observations (so his manuscript tells us) from the aquarium at Battery Park. His first example is the stork minnow which protects its own nest but moves quickly to rob that of a neighbor. Second, the hermit crab, writes Dreiser, "offers an even more interesting example of how the game of life is fought."³ This crab gains a succession of houses by first dispossessing small snails from their shells and later evicting weaker hermit crabs from other shells. Of this operation Dreiser portentously comments, "you may frequently see in this tank the operation of the law of the survival of the fittest, that makes our world so grim."⁴ The final study, the shark sucker, is a parasite whose behavior prompts Dreiser to observe in a cancelled sentence in his manuscript, "our powerful magnate in the world of finance must have many such hangers on."⁵

The original manuscript for the article, held in the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania, shows that the editorial changes made for publication went further than the correction of stylistic lapses. The editor cut a great deal of Dreiser's verbiage, to be sure. But more interesting are the deletions which moderate Dreiser's tone and reduce the number of his labored parallels between the instinctual life of the aquarium and the self-serving quality of public human "morality." For instance, the manuscript (but not the published article) asserts that the hermit crab offers an interesting example of "public morality" and that the treachery of the hungry stork minnows "indicates a kind of human morality." And Dreiser's declaration "the interest which these observations have for us is that they parallel life so closely" is diluted to the level of the rhetorical question "do not these examples furnish excellent illustrations of our own physical and social condition?"

Dreiser had always been interested in observing nature. Ellen Moers in *Two Dreisers* reports that his fascination with the work of Jacques Loeb sprang from a sincere concern: "Plants, insects, and life in or near the water had fascinated Dreiser from his earliest years, and the novels he published

in the 1910's were full of parables drawn from marine life: the protozoa, the lobster, the squid, and the 'Mycteroperca Bonaci,' as Dreiser enjoyed naming the Black Grouper."⁶ And his tendency to see man as a duplicitious animal is stated as early as 1896 in a scathing editorial in *Ev'ry Month*:

Do you not know that human beings are innately greedy--avaricious? Do you not know that they dream of fine clothes and fine houses and of rolling about luxuriously in carriages while others beg along the pathway? Will you not realize that some will stoop to anything for this, will lie, will steal, yes, murder, to make this dream come true? Are you unaware that the strongest are sore tempted by money and offers of place and name, and will you then let the affairs of your country fall into the hands of those who will not stop at aught to gain their shameless ends?⁷

It was not, then, such a big step to the penultimate paragraph of "A Lesson from the Aquarium" in which the behavior of the stork minnow, hermit crab, and shark sucker is compared to that of the capitalist and his lackey.

When Dreiser returns to the image of life in the aquarium in *The Financier*, however, the forces have taken on an amoral or neutral quality. After the publication of "A Lesson from the Aquarium" in January of 1906 a number of things happened to Dreiser which help to explain his shift in attitude. First, he became a successful editor with *Smith's* and later with the Butterick trio of fashion design magazines. Second, he saw to the reissuing and successful distribution and reception of *Sister Carrie*. Third, he made what was for him a great deal of money. He moved up in social circles: he became a resident member of the National Arts Club for a time, he wielded a great of power at the Butterick Building, and he and Jug moved to successively more fashionable addresses. Finally, his editorial policies in selecting fiction for the magazines he edited ran counter to his earlier standards for his own writing. Thus, he must--perhaps unconsciously--have grown ambivalent toward the forces which produced wealth.

A few years later while writing *The Financier*, Dreiser declared in a letter, "I should like to see a race of people for once on this earth who like Niccolo Machiavelli could look life in the face."⁸ In *The Financier*, of course, it is young Frank Cowperwood who looks "life in the face." What he sees is most vividly brought home to the boy while he is standing before an aquarium:

He was forever pondering, pondering--one fact as-

tonished him quite as much as another--for he could not figure out how this thing he had come into--this life--was organized. . . . There was a fish market not so very far from his home, and there . . . he liked to look at a certain tank in front of the store where were kept odd specimens of sea-life brought in by the Delaware Bay fishermen. . . . One day he saw a squid and a lobster put in the tank, and in connection with them was witness to a tragedy which stayed with him all his life and cleared up things considerably intellectually. The lobster, it appeared from the talk of idle bystanders, was offered no food, as the squid was considered his rightful prey. . . . The lobster would leap like a catapult to where the squid was apparently idly dreaming, and the squid very alert, would dart away, shooting out at the very same time a cloud of ink, behind which it would disappear. It was not always completely successful, however. Small portions of its body or its tail were frequently left in the claws of the monster below. Fascinated by the drama, young Cowperwood came daily to watch.⁹

After the squid is at last cut in two and devoured by the lobster, Cowperwood is convinced that he has found the answer to his earlier question about the organization of life: "That's the way it has to be, I guess. . . . The squid wasn't quick enough." He extends this lesson from the natural world to explain the behavior of men in the financial and social worlds.

From the conclusion that "things lived on each other--that was it," it is but a small step for Cowperwood to the propositions that the white man lives on the black man and that the rich man lives on the poor. Dreiser had explored the connection between the natural world of the aquarium and the world of human morality in *Tom Watson's Magazine* in 1906. In 1912 he returned to the theme in *The Financier*. Then his hero, Cowperwood, embraces the concept of a social and financial jungle where the strong survive and the weak perish.

¹ Dr. John H. Girdner, associate editor of *Tom Watson's Magazine*, quoted in *The New York Times*, 18 December 1904, p. 1.

² *American Newspaper Annual* (Philadelphia: N. W. Ayer and Son, 1906), p. 1193.

³ Theodore Dreiser, "A Lesson from the Aquarium," *Tom*

Watson's Magazine, 3 (January, 1906), p. 307.

⁴ Dreiser, p. 307.

⁵ Theodore Dreiser, Manuscript of "A Lesson from the Aquarium" held in the Dreiser Collection at the University of Pennsylvania, Case File 173.

⁶ Ellen Moers, *Two Dreisers* (New York: Viking Press, 1969), p. 248.

⁷ Theodore Dreiser, *Ev'ry Month*, 2 (1896), p. 2. Quoted by Yoshinobu Hakutani, "Theodore Dreiser's Editorial and Free-Lance Writing," *Library Chronicle*, 37 (Winter, 1971), p. 75.

⁸ Theodore Dreiser, Letter to William C. Lengel, 15 October 1911, in *Letters of Theodore Dreiser: A Selection*, ed. Robert Elias (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), I, p. 121.

⁹ Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier*, rev. ed. (New York: New American Library, 1967), pp. 7-8.

Dreiser News & Notes

Plots and Characters in the Fiction of Theodore Dreiser by Philip L. Gerber was published in March by Archon Books as part of its "Plots and Characters Series." . . . Scheduled for April publication by Wayne State University Press is *Theodore Dreiser: A Selection of Uncollected Prose* edited by Donald Pizer. . . . The autumn issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* will be devoted to Dreiser. Jack Salzman is guest editor of this special issue. . . . *The New Mencken Letters* edited by Carl Bode (Dial Press, 1977) contains 23 letters from Mencken to Dreiser plus numerous interesting comments on Dreiser in Mencken's correspondence with others. For instance, in a letter to Edgar Lee Masters on the subject of "famous last words" (31 Oct. 1925?), Mencken states, "Dreiser's are already selected: 'Shakespeare, I come!'"

DREISER'S USE OF THE "ENGLISH JEFFERIES" IN JENNIE GERHARDT

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In *Jennie Gerhardt* (1911), Dreiser's second novel about a ruined maiden, the moment of seduction is skirted in a most interesting fashion. At the point of panting, Dreiser suspends the narration to quote two lengthy poetic flights from the "English Jefferies." Then he concludes the chapter (VII) by inviting the reader to consider whether he could resist seizing the day were it extended to him in the form of a beautiful young maiden. Who, one may ask, is Jefferies, and why does Dreiser bring him so prominently into the novel?

Jefferies is Richard Jefferies (1848-1887), an English essayist and naturalist of considerable renown in his day who presently is enjoying something of a revival along with fellow English rural apologists such as W. H. Hudson. Jefferies' works include *The Gamekeeper At Home*, *Wood Magic*, *Bevis*, and *The Story of My Heart*. The work which Dreiser draws upon is the essay "Beauty in the Country," collected in the volume of essays *The Open Air* (1885). There were two other editions, in 1886 and 1893, available when Dreiser began his novel in 1901. The length and accuracy of Dreiser's transcription suggest that a copy of the essay was in his hands when he composed the first draft. Dreiser paraphrased the opening sentence of the essay and quoted nearly all of the closing paragraph of the first section, sub-titled "The Making of a Beauty." There are a few accidentals involving punctuation and a few minor changes in phrasing. The only substantive change is Dreiser's converting a question in Jefferies--"Is this why passion is almost sad?--into the declarative: "That is why passion is almost sad."¹

Jefferies' essay is not about seduction; rather it is a passionate celebration of maidenly beauty and of the elements responsible for creating such beauty. The lives of the maiden's forebears, going back 150 years, must have been shaped by "open air, hard manual labour or continuous exercise, good food, good clothing, some degree of comfort, all of these, but most especially open air"² In addition, the absolute social necessity for the development of pastoral

beauty is the "stationary home keeping the family intact."³ Dreiser's Jennie is defined in both ironic and complementary terms with reference to the Jefferies model. Jennie is hemmed in by poverty, a drab urban setting, unprepossessing parents, and most of all by an unstable family home which threatens constantly to splinter and which does when the mother dies. But Jennie is also an open-air girl who through metaphor, setting, and action is linked to the benign, almost transcendental elements of nature outside the prison-house of the material. Chapter II, for example, is an expository presentation of the "spirit of Jennie," a spirit identified with "trees, flowers, the world of sound and the world of color" (p. 15). Passage after passage links Jennie with natural beauty: "Nature's fine curves and shadows touched her as a song itself" (p. 16).

The principal use of the Jefferies passage, however, is a matter of rhetorical craft rather than of characterization. Dreiser saw that by employing Jefferies' heightened description of the natural affinities of feminine beauty with the beauty of "all enchanted things of earth and air,"⁴ he could justify Jennie's deflowering. His strategy results in a highly romanticized argument quite different from the quasi-scientific, evolutionary defense of Carrie's "fall" (see Chapter VIII, *Sister Carrie*). Following the Jefferies quotation, Dreiser concludes the chapter with an imitation of Jefferies' rhetoric. The intent is to seduce the genteel reader into condoning if not applauding Senator Brander's actions:

If you have understood and appreciated the beauty of harebells three hundred times repeated; if the quality of the roses, of the music, of the ruddy mornings and evenings of the world has ever touched your heart; if all beauty were passing, and you were given these things to hold in your arms before the world slipped away, would you give them up? (p. 77)

Thus ends the scene in the novel, but in the holograph there is an additional paragraph which describes the moment of possession:

The passion for beauty was upon the ex-senator. He held this precious burden closer and closer to his heart. It was passion, appreciation, emotion. At midnight he was still holding her [cancellation indecipherable]. By morning he had the glory of her virtue, all that three hundred years had builded [cancellation indecipherable] was his he knew. The quality of his tenderness was his reward her undoing.⁵

In revising and completing the novel years later, Dreiser wisely decided to omit this passage. If retained, it would have suggested a comic basis for Senator Brander's eventual heart-attack as we would be likely to infer that the exertions of this long night's foreplay surely must have strained the heart of the fifty-two year-old man. This omission was one of a series of revisions that Dreiser made in the characterizations of Jennie and Senator Brander, all intended, as Richard Lehan has most profitably shown, to soften the coarseness, lust, and aggressive self-interest of Brander and Jennie in the first version.⁶ It is interesting, though, that from the beginning to the final published version Jefferies was a constant and indispensable factor in Dreiser's invitational and participatory rhetoric of seduction in *Jennie Gerhardt*.

¹"Beauty in the Country," *The Open Air* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1926), p. 174. *Jennie Gerhardt* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1911), p. 77. Page numbers for subsequent quotation from *Jennie Gerhardt* are included in the text.

²*The Open Air*, p. 169.

³*Ibid.*, p. 173.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 174; *Jennie Gerhardt*, p. 77.

⁵Holograph of *Jennie Gerhardt*. Chapter X of the manuscript, of which this scene appears to be a part (no Chapter XI is designated, the manuscript proceeding from X to XII), bears the date February 3, 1901. This material is contained in Box 33 of the Dreiser Collection at the Charles Patterson Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania. For permission to quote from the manuscript I am grateful to Dr. Neda Westlake. I also wish to thank Catherine Callen for bibliographical assistance with the Jefferies quotation.

⁶*Theodore Dreiser; His World and His Novels* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1974 [1969]), pp. 84-85.

ASK MR. MARKLE?

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For at least a year of the Dreiser family's residence in Terre Haute, Indiana, they were neighbors of Augustus Robert Markle, future Vigo County historian and locally recognized authority on Dreiserana. Until his death in 1957, all inquiries concerning the family's years in and around Terre Haute were inevitably directed to him. As one graduate student began a letter to Markle in 1951, ". . . everywhere I turn--to the Wm Henry Smith Library, to Indiana University, to Dreiser biographer Robert Elias--everyone says, 'Ask Mr. Markle.' And so I do."¹ To date, however, Markle's research and conclusions have not been widely circulated. Some of the material has appeared in local newspapers² or has been obtained through personal correspondence with Markle, but much remains in typescripts filed in the Dreiser-Dresser scrapbooks at the Fairbanks Memorial Library, Terre Haute, Indiana.

Markle's work has uncovered enough factual evidence to resolve several questions about Dreiser's early childhood and correct numerous errors in such autobiographical works as *Dawn*, *A Hoosier Holiday*, and "My Brother Paul." Yet, as a Fairbanks librarian warned W. A. Swanberg, Markle's conclusions should be accepted "with a grain of salt,"³ for much of his writing about Dreiser has the definite flavor of a personal vendetta. In a typescript titled "Theodore Dreiser--Historian?" Markle readily admitted that he had disliked Dreiser when they were children and had since been disgusted by the novelist's "slant on life and the vulgarity often displayed in his topics and expressions" Later in the same typescript, Markle recalled that Dreiser, two years his junior, "seemed nothing more than a pasty-faced brat who displayed a rather obnoxious method of enjoyment on the schoolyard." Then, with obvious relish, Markle proceeded to narrate a doubtful incident in which the six-year-old Dreiser was punished by a teacher and then by his peers for pulling up the girls' petticoats.

As an apparent result of this lifelong antipathy, Markle constantly placed Dreiser's autobiographical accounts in the worst possible light, often to the point of giving incomplete or simplistic explanations that made Dreiser seem more inaccurate and irresponsible about the facts of his childhood than he

actually was. Thus, since Markle's work remains the most often-used source of local Dreiseriana, some of his errors and oversimplifications should be noted.

Markle's research on the Dreiser family's first period of residence in Sullivan, Indiana, for example, was woefully incomplete.⁴ In *Dawn* and elsewhere, Dreiser made the well-known claim that his father built and owned a woolen mill in Sullivan. For a time, according to Dreiser, this mill prospered to the point that Paul Dreiser was able to give the Catholic Church land on which to build. Then, the mill burned, plunging the family into debt and establishing a poverty existence that shaped Dreiser's life.⁵ Markle challenged much of the Sullivan account, stating flatly that "there is no record of ownership of any property there at any time by any one of the name of Dreiser or Dresser."⁶ Such, however, is not the case. Between 1867 and 1870, Paul Dreiser purchased three pieces of property in Sullivan. On July 20, 1867, he secured Lots 3 and 4 in the Snow, Cochran Addition for \$140.00 (Sullivan County Deed Record, XXIV, 373). Then, in January, 1869, he added Lot 2 in the same addition for \$80.00 (XXIX, 386). A home was apparently built on these lots, for when they were resold in 1871, their value was \$1400.00 (XXXIII, 30). In May, 1870, Paul Dreiser paid \$125.00 for Lot 3 in the Gray, Watson, & Bloom Addition, near the site of the Sullivan Woolen Mill (XXXII, 81). Whatever plans he had for this lot were apparently short-lived, however, for he resold it less than a year later for the same \$125.00 (XXXIII, 138). These real estate transactions not only demonstrate Markle's lack of thoroughness but also seem to verify Dreiser's contention that his father prospered for a time in Sullivan.

There is, however, nothing to verify Dreiser's assertion in *Dawn* that his father donated the land on which the Sullivan Catholic church was built: "If you were to look at St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church there, you would behold land given by him to that organization, and inside you would find a stained glass window bearing his name as donor."⁷ On this point, Dreiser was clearly confused, for there is no St. Joseph's in Sullivan, only St. Ann's, which has no window to commemorate Paul Dreiser's gift. Nor do the deed records indicate that Paul Dreiser ever owned the land on which that church stands. On the basis of this contradictory evidence, Markle concluded that this claim was just another of Dreiser's total fabrications; in this case, however, "exaggeration" might be the better description. The *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* indicates that the first Catholic church in Sullivan was built in 1867-8 through the generous donations of local residents.⁸ Since the Dreisers were among the five or six Catholic families living in Sullivan at the time, their con-

tributions could well have been sizable without being recorded for posterity.

Markle has also noted several contradictions between the facts of the case and Dreiser's claim that his father built and/or owned the Sullivan Woolen Mill, and contradictions do exist. The Sullivan County Deed Records show that the five lots on which the mill later stood were purchased by a Jewett family for \$500.00 in March, 1866 (XXII, 510). The mill was apparently constructed shortly thereafter. During her correspondence with Markle in 1941, Mary Francis Brennen, Dreiser's oldest sister, referred to the Jewett brothers as her father's partners and said that they ruined the business during his illness.⁹ None of the deed records, however, bear Paul Dreiser's name as owner or co-owner. Also, the *Sullivan Democrat*, until April, 1870, advertised the mill as being under the management of the Jewett brothers. Then, on May 11, 1870, the property was purchased by Terre Haute businessman Chauncey Rose for \$10,646.85 (XXXII, 145). The *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* indicates that Rose had financed the original construction of the mill.¹⁰ Prior to the deed transfer to Rose, Paul Dreiser must have been an employee, perhaps a foreman or manager; afterward, however, he apparently became more involved financially. On May 14, 1870, just three days after the deed transfer, Paul Dreiser bought the previously mentioned lot adjacent to the mill. Also, in June, 1870, the advertisements in the *Sullivan Democrat* began to appear over his name. All indications suggest that Dreiser's father managed the mill for Rose or perhaps leased it. The mill was apparently damaged in the fall of 1870, not 1869 (the year frequently given).¹¹ After September 21, 1870, the newspaper advertisement ceased; then, on February 23, 1871, Rose resold the property for \$7,000.000, a loss of approximately \$3,500 (XXXIII, 7). In March, 1871, Paul Dreiser sold his home in Sullivan, and in April the new owners of the mill purchased his adjacent lot. Apparently, the Dreiser family returned to Terre Haute in the spring or early summer of 1871. In its section on the Sullivan Woolen Mill, the *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* mentions neither Paul Dreiser nor the damage to the property.¹²

The Dreisers returned to Terre Haute too late to be included in the 1871 city directory; thus, Theodore's birthplace has been difficult to identify. Then, to compound the problem, Dreiser himself has given researchers some false leads and multiple choices. In *Dawn* (p. 7) he located his birthplace on 9th Street; in *A Hoosier Holiday* (p. 402) he identified it more specifically as being on the corner of 9th and Chestnut. Also, in *A Hoosier Holiday* (p. 398) Dreiser included a Franklin Booth sketch of a house which the context of the narrative would place at the corner of 12th and Walnut; the caption

reads: "Franklin's Impression of My Birthplace."

Typically, Markle chose to disregard Dreiser's identification and place his trust in other members of the family, in this case the eighty-year-old Mary Francis Brennen, who was ten when Theodore was born. In 1941, Mrs. Brennen wrote Markle that she remembered living near a Maloney family at that time. Having checked the 1871 Terre Haute city directory and found a Maloney listed near the corner of 9th and Oak, Markle photographed the neighboring houses and sent prints to "Mame" for identification. On the strength of her childhood memories, Markle then concluded: "As nearly as can be ascertained, Theodore was born on South Ninth Street in the house which is now numbered 525."¹³ This address, however, is obviously erroneous, for 525 South 9th Street does not exist in Terre Haute today, did not exist in 1941, and apparently never has existed. The house that most closely fits the description in Mrs. Brennen's correspondence is at 523 South 9th Street. If this is indeed the house that Markle intended to identify, he and Dreiser ultimately came to the same conclusion about the birthplace. Recently Marguerite Tjader Harris sent the *Dreiser Newsletter* a xerox copy of a telegram she received from Dreiser, dated August 7, 1944. The first line reads: "Address of birth place 523 South 9th Street."

Markle's investigation of Terre Haute deed records and city directories did, however, support Mrs. Brennen's contention that the family's poverty during the Terre Haute years was greatly exaggerated. As "Mame's" friend, Carmel O'Neill Haley, wrote for *Commonweal* in 1933, ". . . the Dreiser's poverty has been accentuated by one who was too young to recall the earlier days. They lived in a pretty, comfortable home suitable to their means, a wonderful mother superintending the well-kept house and garden."¹⁴ The above-mentioned Terre Haute records lend credence to the contention that Theodore's early childhood was more stable than it is usually pictured; at least, the family was not harried from one rental property to a shabbier one quite as frequently as the autobiographies suggest. The Vigo County Deed Records show that Paul Dreiser purchased the property on the southwest corner of Walnut and 12th Streets (203 South 12th Street) for \$1,200.00 on September 11, 1871, the day after Theodore's baptism at St. Benedict's Catholic Church (XLIII, 86). For the next seven years, the Terre Haute city directories locate the family at this address. Then, on May 21, 1878, the property was sold for \$1,400.00, subject to a mortgage of \$1,000.00 (LII, 401-2). Participating in this sale, Mrs. Dreiser made "her mark."

Thus, most of the family's moving took place during Theodore's final year in Terre Haute and after he left with his

mother and two children for Vincennes and then Sullivan. The 1879 directory has the Dreisers at 533 North 7th Street. By the next year, the address had changed to 205 North 13th Street, only the father and six oldest children being listed. From 1881 through 1884, only Paul Dreiser is listed, boarding first at 128 and then 118 South 1st Street. For the next three years, 1885 through 1887, there are no Dreisers listed in the directories. Then, in 1888, the last mention is made of a Dreiser in Terre Haute: Paul Dreiser, wool sorter, boarding at the Anderson House. Other residences mentioned in *Dawn* and *A Hoosier Holiday* were occupied too briefly to be listed or are the products of Dreiser's faulty memory. The house on the northwest corner of 12th and Poplar Streets (*Dawn*, p. 15) is undoubtedly the 12th and Walnut property. The 14th Street address (*Dawn*, p. 21; *HH*, p. 402) is not listed, nor are the residences at 7th and Chestnut (*HH*, p. 402) and 8th and Chestnut (*HH*, p. 405). The 13th Street address, where Dreiser recalled being ill (*Dawn*, pp. 21-22; *HH*, p. 402), may well have been his last home in Terre Haute, for it is not listed until 1880, the year after the family split up. Throughout the directories, the family name is spelled "Dresser" about as often as it is spelled "Dreiser," giving substance to "Mame's" assertion that her brother Paul changed his name because he grew weary of its being so frequently misspelled and mispronounced.¹⁵

Thus, an investigation of the available facts leads to the inevitable conclusion that in his later autobiographical writings Dreiser was careless with details and prone to exaggeration. But then, Dreiser admitted as much: "What I have here written," he said of *Dawn*, "is probably no more than accumulated and assorted hearsay, collated and arranged after the facts."¹⁶ In virtually every instance, however, there is the bedrock of truth that often provides the foundation for family legends, and all too often, Dreiser's accounts are more in keeping with the facts than are Markle's attempts to set the record straight.

¹ George Steinbrecher, Jr., to A. R. Markle, August 6, 1951. This letter is among the Markle papers, Fairbanks Memorial Library, Terre Haute, Indiana.

² See, for example, "Some Light on Paul Dresser," *Terre Haute Tribune*, April 14, 1940; also, "Paul Dresser, One of Terre Haute's Traditions, and Our Favorite Balladist," *Terre Haute Tribune*, March 21, 1954. Dreiser is discussed in these articles to demonstrate his inaccuracies concerning the Terre Haute years.

³ Stillman K. Taylor to W. A. Swanberg, August 19, 1964. Dreiser file, Fairbanks Memorial Library.

⁴ The Dreiser family's first move to Sullivan is difficult to date, for city directories were not printed or were not preserved for the years 1864-6. Mary Francis Brennen in her correspondence with Markle states that Theresa Mary was born in Sullivan in 1864; however, the woolen mill was apparently not constructed until 1866 and Paul Dreiser's first property transaction in Sullivan took place in July, 1867. Swanberg indicates that the move took place in 1867 (p. 5).

⁵ *Dawn*, pp. 5-7, 166.

⁶ "Some New Light on Dresser," p. 10.

⁷ *Dawn*, p. 166. In *A Hoosier Holiday* (p. 392), Dreiser indicated that his father had donated the land on which St. Joseph's in Terre Haute now stands. St. Joseph's has been at its present site since 1837.

⁸ "The Catholic Church," *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties* (Chicago, 1884), p. 624.

⁹ Mary Francis Brennen to A. R. Markle, January 13, 1941. Excerpts from the Brennen-Markle correspondence have been preserved in typescript in the Dreiser-Dresser file, Fairbanks Memorial Library, Terre Haute.

¹⁰ *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties*, p. 613.

¹¹ Lehan, McAleer, and Swanberg place the damage to the mill in 1869. See Richard Lehan, *Theodore Dreiser: His World and His Novels*, p. 3; John J. McAleer, *Theodore Dreiser: An Introduction and Interpretation*, p. 6; and W. A. Swanberg, *Dreiser*, p. 5.

¹² *History of Greene and Sullivan Counties*, p. 613.

¹³ "Theodore Dreiser--Historian?" Dreiser-Dresser file, Fairbanks Memorial Library, Terre Haute.

¹⁴ Carmel O'Neill Haley, "The Dreisers," *Commonweal*, XVIII (July 7, 1933), 267.

¹⁵ Brennen to Markle, January 13, 1941.

¹⁶ *Dawn*, p. 22.

THEODORE DREISER'S INTRODUCTION TO *McTEAGUE*

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In the spring of 1927, Theodore Dreiser was asked to write the introduction to *McTeague* for the Argonaut Manuscript Limited Edition of Frank Norris's Work. The volume appeared in 1928 under the Doubleday, Doren & Company imprint. In his introductory remarks, Dreiser recalls the impact *McTeague* had on him and his career as a writer of naturalistic fiction. He praises Norris for being one of the first rank of American realistic novelists, but laments the lack of critical attention Norris has received from European and American critics who have "noisily lauded" Stephen Crane, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, Sinclair Lewis, and Joseph Hergesheimer while "evading" Norris. Dreiser is especially angry at the attention accorded Crane and at his being credited as the pioneer realist in American fiction. That honor, he felt, properly belonged to Henry B. Fuller of Chicago.

Dreiser's introduction is a rambling, highly personal account of his debt to Norris, and, until his attack on Crane, it is a clear one. He becomes so intent on discrediting Crane and praising Fuller that the introduction about Norris turns into a muddled attempt to prove that Henry B. Fuller preceded Crane as a realistic novelist, and Dreiser, who was never too careful about chronology, becomes hopelessly inaccurate in assigning publishing dates to the various novels he calls forth to prove his case. First he notes that Fuller's novel *With the Procession*, a book which had a great impact on his own career as a budding novelist of the urban scene, was published in 1886. Actually the book was issued by Harper Brothers in 1895. Next he mentions a second of Fuller's novels, *The Cliff Dwellers* [sic], as appearing in 1891. It was serialized in *Harper's* from June 3 to August 12, 1893, and appeared in book form under the Harper imprint in the fall of that year.

These errors would remain annoying although relatively inconsequential if Dreiser did not insist on arguing that Fuller was the first of the realistic novelists, and proceed to attempt to prove his case by hinging his argument on these dates. He disallows the primacy of Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* because he says it followed Fuller's earliest novel by

some three years. Dreiser compounds the confusion of his dates by suggesting that Hamlin Garland's early collection of realistic stories, *Main Travelled Roads* [sic], appeared in 1894, thereby further discrediting the critical argument in favor of Crane. All of this is additionally complicated by the fact that Dreiser completely omits mention of Crane's first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, which was published in 1893.

Dreiser, in his attempt to establish Fuller's position as the earliest writer of realistic fiction, ranks the novels in the following chronological order: Fuller's *With the Procession* (1886), Fuller's *The Cliff-Dwellers* (1891), Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* (1894), and finally Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895). This seeming confusion is really quite simple. The corrected chronology is as follows: Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads* appeared in 1891; Henry Fuller's *The Cliff-Dwellers* and Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893; Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* bears the copyright date of 1894 in the D. Appleton and Company imprint, but appeared in 1895, as did Fuller's *With the Procession*. Dreiser ignores, although indeed may not have known about, the appearance of parts of *The Red Badge of Courage* in a number of newspapers late in 1894 (see R. W. Stallman, *Stephen Crane: A Critical Bibliography*, Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1972).

Although Dreiser's chronology is inaccurate, his argument is not. Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* was preceded by Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads*, and both of the Fuller novels Dreiser mentions appeared at least during the same years as Crane's earliest work. It is interesting to note that Dreiser retained the same incorrect chronology for a later article on realistic fiction he wrote for the *American Spectator* in December of 1932 entitled "The Great American Novel."

Dreiser was notoriously bad about accurate dating, and while such inaccuracies should be pointed out and corrected, perhaps we should not be too hard on him for such minor inconsistencies. The introduction to *McTeague* is a case in point. The reason Dreiser got entangled in trying to prove the pre-eminence of Fuller's early realistic novels was to pay off a literary debt of long standing, and to give recognition to a friend who by 1927 was an inactive member of the literary community. Living in obscurity in Chicago, Fuller was feeling strongly his isolation and old age. His books were out of print, and his literary obituary had already been written by the critics of his time. We are unable to tell what, if any, solace Fuller received from efforts such as Dreiser's to measure the influence of his urban fiction. It is to Dreiser's

credit that he publicly acknowledged his debt to a man who during his lifetime had performed countless kind acts for young and inexperienced writers. It is appropriate that someone of Dreiser's stature should have praised the work of Henry Blake Fuller.

DREISER SEMINAR AT MLA

Approximately 35 to 40 people jammed a small, inadequately ventilated room to listen to a panel discussion on the topic "Critical Perspectives on Dreiser: *An American Tragedy*" at the 1976 MLA Convention in New York. The panel consisted of Paul A. Orlov, Donald Pizer and Jack Salzman. Richard Lehan and Charles Shapiro, who had been listed as panelists in the published program, were unable to attend because of a family commitment and illness, respectively.

Donald Pizer began the discussion by outlining his approach to *An American Tragedy* in his recently published *The Novels of Theodore Dreiser*. Noting that a critic's judgment of an author is partially shaped by other critics' discussions, Pizer discussed his response to three positions on Dreiser that have appeared in previous criticism: that Dreiser as a documentary author was merely a copiest; that, as a naturalist, Dreiser set out to show that Clyde is what his heredity and environment are; and that the most significant and permanent element in the novel is its parody of the Horatio Alger myth. In answer to the "myth" that Dreiser was a copiest, Pizer attempted to demonstrate in his book that Dreiser handled the New York *World* material he used for his facts on the Gillette-Brown case with "great sophistication." Indeed, Pizer said, it was the difference between the factual base and Dreiser's inventions that informed his reading of *An American Tragedy*. He illustrated his point by discussing Dreiser's "imaginative recasting" of Grace Brown's letters. In response to the second position, Pizer indicated that he did not wish to deny Dreiser's naturalism in the novel as much as to show that Dreiser was not working within a formally ideological way; Dreiser presents Clyde's being "shaped by the world" not as idea, but as shared experience. Finally in answer to the position that the most vital element in the novel is its parody of the Alger myth, Pizer noted that there is this theme, but it is somewhat limiting. Again, his response was not to deny, but to suggest that Dreiser wished to emphasize something permanent in the story of Clyde, and thus the emphasis should be on the word "tragedy" in the title. Pizer said that in his book he

tried to avoid a hard and fast definition of tragedy and show, instead, how Dreiser gave the novel a "tragic sense" by emphasizing Clyde's pain and his desire to be understood.

Professor Salzman began his comments by repeating Michael Millgate's statement that life is too short to read Dreiser and noted that Dreiser criticism has to attend to Millgate's remark. Why should we be reading Dreiser rather than a host of other writers? He indicated that he found Dreiser criticism "deadening in some way" and added he felt there is little future in it, that Elias, Matthiessen, Lehan and others have said all there is to say. In fact, he suggested, lately scholars have created a Dreiser industry. Salzman continued by pointing out that Dreiser was fascinated by power and corruption and had the honesty to express that fascination. In *An American Tragedy* and Dreiser's other novels, we see Dreiser's struggle to make sense of his country and himself. Therefore, Salzman argued, it is time to acknowledge Dreiser was not parodying Alger in *An American Tragedy*; rather what's colossal about his work is his great theme of the failure of America--a vision which grew out of his struggle with himself. In closing Salzman returned to the point behind Millgate's remark: what does Dreiser have to offer? Asserting that Dreiser has very little to teach us, Salzman suggested that Dreiser's power is to move us emotionally, not intellectually.

Moderator Paul Orlov opened his remarks by saying he disagreed with Salzman's feeling that there is no future in Dreiser criticism and hoped to show in his comments that there is substance to be probed critically in Dreiser. The central theme of *An American Tragedy*, he suggested, is the erosion of individual identity. Dreiser, he continued, does not show us interpersonal relationships in the novel, but rather elaborations of fantasies between people: Roberta feeds a kind of narcissism in Clyde and Clyde a kind of narcissism in Sondra. He then turned to the kitchen scene in the Finchley home to illustrate that while Sondra is not a person so much as a symbol for Clyde, Clyde has very little personal reality for her either, that, indeed, he functions as a reflector for her of an idealized image of herself. He concluded by arguing that Sondra's treatment of Clyde was a symbol of society's treatment of him.

Following Orlov's remarks there was a discussion among panelists and the audience ranging from the validity of Salzman's comments on Dreiser criticism to next year's format for the seminar.

--Frederic E. Rusch

THE FUTURE OF DREISER SEMINARS

Feeling that the lack of discussions on Dreiser in academic forums such as that provided by the MLA conventions is symptomatic of and perhaps a partial cause for the general lack of recognition given Theodore Dreiser as a major writer, I organized and chaired a seminar at the 1975 MLA sessions in San Francisco. This past December, at the 1976 MLA convention in New York, we held a sequel to the west coast meeting. At the close of the New York meeting, one member of the audience raised a question that had already begun to trouble me, and that was concerning several Dreiser scholars who attended and participated in the two MLA sessions: Is there a constructive future for meetings on Dreiser at MLA conventions? This is intended as an open letter to all readers of the *Dreiser Newsletter*; your attention to it, and responses to it, let me say at once, will be very much appreciated.

Professor Jack Salzman asked the New York audience whether there is anything new and important still to say about Dreiser, or whether we are just going over old ground over and over again. That question is a central one for the matter at hand. Professor Ellen Moers has suggested that future MLA sessions might be held to discuss the special problems and challenges posed or revealed by the Dreiser Edition now emerging at the University of Pennsylvania. One reason I sought to organize the two Dreiser MLA gatherings at all was my personal conviction that there are still original, worthwhile things to say about *Sister Carrie*, the *Tragedy*, and perhaps other Dreiser books. But such individual ideas don't take us very far; we need the views of many Dreiser readers and scholars on a number of questions. Here they are:

1. Is there enough interest among those who care about the work of Dreiser to justify holding further seminars at MLA?
2. If further meetings are to be organized, what should be their subjects, their purpose, their formats? For example, at the two recent sessions, panelists spoke informally and interacted with an audience encouraged to participate. Is that the best approach, or should we have papers formally written, xeroxed in advance for distribution to all in attendance, and read and discussed at the meetings?
3. Finally, in connection with the previous questions, I

wish to ask whether there is any interest among Dreiserians in the formation of a Dreiser society? It should be made clear immediately that such a hypothetical organization would be formed, if at all, completely independent of all ties with the *Dreiser Newsletter*. This would be necessary for a number of reasons. And the "society" I am referring to would have as its primary function and reason for being (at least at present) this basic matter: it would enable us, if it had enough members, to institutionalize a Dreiser seminar as a regular part of the annual MLA convention. The yearly meetings on Dreiser would then be organized by the society; such an arrangement, in addition to securing a future for discussions of Dreiser, could improve the engendering of ideas for the meetings' topics and the publicizing of the events to be held.

At the moment, at least to my knowledge, no meeting on Dreiser has been scheduled for the 1977 MLA convention to be held in Chicago. The possibilities of a Dreiser seminar at that time as well as thereafter should be reflected upon, and determined, *now*. Dreiser's future as a subject for serious inquiry and discussion at such an academic forum rests with all of us who read and think about his work. Acting as chairman of the two recent sessions and as just one who cares about Dreiser as a writer, I appeal to all who read this letter to respond to the questions I have raised.

Kindly send expressions of interest in sponsoring and attending future MLA sessions, suggestions for discussion topics and/or potential formats for meetings, indications of readiness to volunteer to be panelists or to write papers for potential seminars, and comments on the idea of a "Dreiser Society" to me at: 620 Oakridge Drive, London, Ontario, Canada N6H 3G2. Your thoughts and those of your colleagues are essential, so whatever your view, do speak up! The next issue of the *Dreiser Newsletter* should contain some information on the resolution to the problems set forth here--and, perhaps, on an upcoming meeting, if interest merits it.

--Paul A. Orlov
University of Toronto